"KENSINGTON SIGHTS"

A Self-Guided Tour of Kensington Compiled for:
Summer in the City: Training Program in Urban Ministry
and Parish Partnerships

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"Kensington Sights"

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"Kensington Sights"

A. START...

1. ST. LUKE'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, "B" and Huntingdon Streets. St. Luke's grew out of the Episcopal Hospital Mission started in 1863 under Miss Catherine C. Biddle and Miss Vandervoort. The Church was consecrated on May 1, 1904 and is now a mission of the Diocese. During the Depression, Father Colony put coal in the bins of many people in Kensington so that they could have heat. At times when companies would otherwise have closed, putting many out of work, he started cooperatives at a hosiery mill and a towel mill to save jobs. The present Vicar of St. Luke's is Father Cutler.

B. Drive north on "B" Street to Lehigh Avenue. Turn right and continue to the next traffic light. Turn right onto Kensington Avenue with the Elevated train overhead.

2. THE FRANKFORD ELEVATED TRAIN runs from 69th Street to Frankford. The El was constructed in 1922 and had a tremendous impact on the community. First, it opened up the Greater Northeast as a residential area for working people. It also opened the neighborhoods to the larger city whereupon they lost some of their individuality and were gradually displaced as the primary center of organization and entertainment.

3. ALBERT STREET, the second street on the left. Albert Street was the focus of Philadelphia's racial tension in 1974. See "Kensington Episodes", VI.

4. THE KENSINGTON JOINT ACTION COUNCIL (KJAC), 2538 Kensington Avenue is a multiracial community organization which engages in efforts to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. Once a month KJAC holds a community meeting at St. Luke's and St. Barnabas' on Crime and Safety in the neighborhood with Assistant D.A. James Carroll.

5. THE ST. FRANCIS INN, 2441 Kensington Avenue. Roman Catholic Franciscan Brothers and Sisters opened this soup kitchen in 1979. It serves many of the neighborhood's poor. The Franciscans also operate two thrift shops, and shelters for men and women.

C. Turn left on Hagert Street by the St. Francis Inn. As you turn if you look down Kensington Avenue, it intersects with Front Street at the DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE (6.) Approximately 24% of the people in our neighborhood rely on public assistance. One block down Hagert Street turn left onto Jasper Street. Drive two blocks and turn right onto Cumberland Street. Follow Cumberland Street all the way to Beach Street.

7. GOOD SHEPHERD EPISCOPAL CHURCH, Collins and Cumberland Streets. Good Shepherd began in 1869. The first church was a frame chapel, which was replaced with the present stone church in 1890.

8. KENSINGTON WATERFRONT, Beach Street. "One hundred and fifty, one hundred, or even fifty years ago, you would have been in the midst of a scene of enormous activity here.

"One hundred years ago, or between 1830 and 1927, the large vacant lot in the direction of the river was the site of CRAMPS SHIPYARD which at its peak after World War I, employed more than 20,000 people. Cramp's specialized in the manufacture of trans-Atlantic liners and vessels for the Navy. This establishment, together with shipbuilders in Chester and across the river in New Jersey, made the Delaware River area the world's largest shipbuilding center during the World War I era.

"In the 1830s... you would have found the self-contained community of DYOTTSVILLE where Dr. Dyott, purveyor of patent medicines and entrepreneur par excellence, employed 400 people, an unusually large number for that period, to manufacture glass bottles for his medicines. Some of Dr. Dyott's bottles are now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

"Just above Dyottsville, beginning in 1842, you would have found, and can still find, the PORT RICHMOND COAL DEPOT. It was here that the Reading Railroad brought the anthracite coal which had been mined in Schuylkill and Carbon Counties, shipped by barge down the Schuylkill River, and transferred to the railroad for the trip across Philadelphia. From the Port Richmond Coal Depot, anthracite was shipped all over the world to provide the energy for industrialization. Some is still transshipped through the terminal, and the loading cranes are visible from Beach Street." (4, p.32-33).

It was at Dyottsville that the stream GUNNER'S RUN emptied into the Delaware. Gunner's Run was made up of tributaries or smaller streams which ran through many areas of Kensington. One branch came down from the mineral springs in Harrowgate (see #35). Gunner's Run "has been underground for many years, probably an enclosed sewer. The creek was originally known as 'The Aramingo' and later probably named after one of the early Swedish settlers, Gunnar Rambo" (6, p.17).

D. Drive down Beach Street, follow it around to the right. It now becomes Schirra Drive. Turn left onto Delaware Avenue. Follow Delaware Avenue to Columbia Street and turn left.

9. "PENN TREATY PARK on the Delaware at Columbia Avenue, marks the spot where Penn is supposed to have made a treaty with the Indians in 1682, concerning land rights. For many years there was a large elm tree under which the meeting was held. The tree

blew down around 1810, and in 1827 a marble monument was erected to commemorate the spot" (6, p.18). The monument can be found in the center of the park with a new sign which was erected in 1978. The words carved on the four sides of the monument are almost obliterated, but they can still be deciphered and read... "Placed by the Penn Society, A.D. 1827 ... To mark the site of the Great Elm Tree ... Treaty Ground of William Penn and the Indian Natives 1682 ... Unbroken Faith ... Pennsylvania Founded 1681 ... By deeds of Penn." A canvas painted by Benjamin West hangs in Independence Hall portraying this event. The 37 foot high statue of William Penn on top of City Hall faces this historic park in Kensington.

Of course the original inhabitants of Kensington or SHACKAMAXON as they called their village were the Lenni-Lenape (meaning real or original people) Tribe of American Indians. They came to the Kensington area from the west and took this land from the Allegewi (from which we get the name Allegheny) Tribe. When the name Delaware was given to the river, the Lenni-Lenape Indians became known as the Delawares. The name of their village, Shackamaxon, meant "the place of the chiefs".

E. Turn around and come out of Columbia Street turning left onto Delaware Avenue. Turn right onto Marlborough Street. Follow Marlborough Street to Belgrade Street.

10. THE KENSINGTON METHODIST CHURCH, called "Old Brick" at Richmond and Marlborough Streets. It has been said that an Indian Burial Ground once existed on the site of the Kensington Methodist Church founded in 1804 (6, p.3).

11. EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 1212 Marlborough Street. The oldest Episcopal Church in Kensington begun in 1837. In the Church's early days, "it sent two missionaries out, the Rev. John Liggins to China and Japan (the first one of the American Church) and Miss Mary Ball to Liberia" (5, p.148).

F. Turn right on Belgrade Street and follow for about four blocks. Turn left on Palmer Street. Follow Palmer to Frankford Avenue.

12. PALMER CEMETARY, Belgrade and Palmer Streets, was given by Mrs. Thomasina Keith in 1749 shortly after the death of her father, Captain Anthony Palmer who gave this area the name "Kensington" when he purchased an estate of 190 acres here in 1730. Captain Palmer was a vestryman of Christ Episcopal Church, 2nd and Market Streets, and is buried in the Christ Church Burial Ground. In the Palmer Cemetary there is a grave dating back to 1732, and it is the resting place of soldiers from the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and this century's two World Wars.

13. FRANKFORD AVENUE. "The Frankford Turnpike came into existence around 1803, although the KINGS HIGHWAY was built over a century before. It ran from center city up Front Street and Frankford Road through Kensington to Frankford, and later on to New York. It was along the Kings Highway (Frankford Road) that Lydia Darragh carried the news to the outposts of General Washington at White Hall of an intended British Attack. She was supposed to be going to get flour from the Frankford Mill" (6, p.15).

G. Turn left onto Frankford Avenue, continue for three blocks and then turn right onto Jefferson Street. Follow Jefferson Street to 2nd Street. Turn left on 2nd Street. Go one block and turn right onto Master Street.

14. THE NANNY GOAT MARKET fronted on Master Street between 2nd Street and Cadwallader Street. It was here that the Nannygoat Market Riot and the Native American Riot took place in the 1840s. See: "Kensington Episodes", II and III.

H. Turn right on Germantown Avenue. Continue to 5th Street. You will then turn to the right onto 5th.

15. On your right is an expanse of black asphalt that once was the JOHN B. STETSON COMPANY, the world's largest manufacturer of men's hats. "The company, begun in 1865 by New Jersey-born entrepreneur John Stetson, was so well known that its name became synonomous with a popular hat style. From the original 'Boss of the Plains' model, the company went on to manufacture hundreds of different kinds of hats until the 1960s when fashions changed and the demand for hats declined. The Stetson plant employed 2,500 men and 1,000 women at capacity and was unusual in that every aspect of the production of the hat was done on the premises. In addition to the main manufacturing buildings and offices, the plant contained a hospital, an auditorium, and a savings and loan association for employees" (4, p.33-34).

I. Drive up 5th Street to Dauphin Street. Turn right on Dauphin. Follow Dauphin Street eight blocks to American Street. Turn left onto American Street and drive north to Huntingdon Street. Turn left onto Huntingdon Street. Follow Huntingdon Street about twelve blocks to Marshall Street (unmarked). Marshall Street is the first street past 6th Street. Turn right on Marshall Street.

16. On Dauphin Street at 3rd is ST. BARNABAS EPISCOPAL CHURCH. St. Barnabas Church began in 1876 to accomodate many of the people who had been attending the Episcopal Hospital Chapel. During the depression of the 1930s, St. Barnabas did alot of work to relieve the suffering of the people in the neighborhood. A Forward Movement Booklet entitled "Signs of the Kingdom" was written by the Rev. David Gracie about St. Barnabas Church. The present Vicar is Father Michael Schirmacher.

17. Two blocks from St. Barnabas' is the AMERICAN STREET CORRIDOR. "In an effort to attract new industries and to keep existing industries, the city has designated certain areas for intensive industrial redevelopment. One of these is American Street, which in times past was one of the most important industrial thoroughfares in the city. Redevelopment activities include clearance of unsound structures, provision of secure parking for industrial employees, resurfacing the street for heavy trucks, and improving rail access. In addition, subsidized, low-interest loans have been made available to existing industrial occupants to modernize their plants. A once important firm along this part of American Street was the Penn Stove Works. More than 400 people worked here in the 1920s making furnaces, stoves, and ranges under the 'Novelty' trademark" (4, p.33).

18. On Huntingdon Street past 4th at Lawrence Street is ST. CHRISTOPHER'S HOSPITAL. This hospital founded in 1875 is well known for its work with children.

19. Three blocks further west on Huntingdon brings us to what was the heart of Kensington's RUG AND CARPET INDUSTRY. "This industry dates back to the Revolution and grew to world importance before the Civil War. By 1870 there were 215 rug and carpet manufacturers in Philadelphia. Originally, these establishments were small and relied on hand looms, but with the introduction of power looms, many of the small firms were replaced by large factories, more than a dozen of which were located in this part of (Kensington)." One block south on Reese Street was the Schofield Mason Company. On the next block at Fairhill Street on the right was their competitor the Stinson Brothers Carpet Company. Pause at Marshall Street before turning right. "The empty lot in front of you between Marshall and 7th Street north of Huntingdon was once occupied by the Oxford Carpet Mills and on your right is what is left of Hardwick and Magee Carpet Company. In 1918 Philadelphia had 3,300 carpet looms, with an annual capacity of 45,000,000 cubic yards. This was more than all other carpet firms in the United States combined" (4, p.35).

J. From Marshall Street turn right onto Lehigh Avenue. Go four blocks and turn left on 5th Street.

20. This is "El BARRIO", a Spanish district in Kensington, complete with brightly painted sidewalks, banners, and a wall mural. Hispanics are the largest growing ethnic group in Kensington. The PUERTO RICAN ALLIANCE, 3604 N. 7th Street, is one of the active Hispanic community organizations which works closely with KJAC.

K. Travel up 5th Street to Allegheny Avenue. Go right on Allegheny to 2nd Street. Turn right on 2nd Street. Just below Indiana Street on the right is the old LABOR LYCEUM

(21.) where the march of mill children led by Mother Jones in 1903 started out (See:"Kensington Episodes", IV). Turn left on Cambria (Cambria is the next street after Indiana) to Front Street. Turn left on Front and return to Allegheny. Turn right on Allegheny. One block south of Allegheny on "A" Street was the H.C. ABERLE AND COMPANY Hosiery Mill (22.) where a bitter strike took place in 1930 leading to Carl Mackley's death (See: "Kensington Episodes", V). Turn left on "B" Street. At the corner of "B" and Allegheny is the STETSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL (23.). Follow "B" Street to Ontario Street. Turn right at Ontario Street to "C" Street and stop for a minute.

24. PHILCO RADIO AND TELEVISION PLANT. "On both sides of Ontario Street is the old Philco Plant which in 1937 distributed 30% of all radios produced in the United States. Begun in 1906 as a manufacturer of storage batteries, the plant became a mass production facility where radio parts, manufactured separately, were put together on the assembly line and delivered directly to waiting trucks and freight cars. The electronics industry, of which this was a prime example, had absorbed many skilled workers when the machine tool industry began to decline; at its peak in the 1950s, Philco employed 12,000 people. The plant closed in 1974, and parts of the operation moved to Willow Grove. Television was pioneered here; in the 1930s a broadcasting station sent regular programs to suburban test stations" (4, p.36).

L. Having turned right onto "C" Street, continue down to Allegheny and turn left. Follow Allegheny to Kensington Avenue (K & A) where you will turn right.

25. Once back on Allegheny, the second street on the right will be Boudinot (unmarked). The PINE STREET SILK MILLS was at the southeast corner of Allegheny and Boudinot. "The silk industry in Philadelphia goes back to William Penn. Throughout the first half of the 18th century, silkworm cocoons and mulberry trees were being imported, and by 1900 there were more than 40 silk factories in the city. Most were in the Kensington textile district. The Pine Tree Mills... was one of the largest" (4, p.36).

26. As you proceed up Allegheny Avenue, ST. NATHANAEL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH is on your left at "E" Street. St. Nathanael's began in 1897, again as an outgrowth of the Episcopal Hospital Mission. Miss Catherine C. Biddle who later was so instrumental in getting St. Luke's started, was a prime mover in establishing St. Nathanael's. The present Vicar is Father James Mole.

27. At "G" Street two blocks to the left was MAYOR WILLIAM GREEN'S HOUSE, on the 3300 block of "G" Street, when he was a boy.

28. One block further on Allegheny brings you to the best known intersection in Kensington, "K AND A", for Kensington and Allegheny Avenues. Here are many shops as well as valuable community services. Three blocks east of K and A at 3160 Frankford Avenue is KENSINGTON ACTION NOW (KAN) a community organization that is active in housing redevelopment. KAN is closely tied to St. Nathanael's and St. John's Churches as well as others. COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES is located at 3156 Kensington Avenue. C.L.S. provides greatly needed legal service to those who otherwise could not afford it.

M. Proceed down Kensington Avenue to Lehigh Avenue where you will turn left.

29. At Kensington Avenue and Indiana Street is MCPHERSON SQUARE which originally "belonged to the McPherson family. The old mansion built by the Revolutionary War General William McPherson occupied the center of the large lot. This building was torn down in 1915 and a new library building erected in 1917. In 1930, it was the scene of the funeral of Carl Mackley which drew a crowd of 35,000. See: "Kensington Episodes", V.

30. After Somerset Street just before going under the railroad tracks on the left is Tusculum Street. This was the "home" of ROCKY BALBOA of the movies Rocky and Rocky II starring Sylvester Stylone.

N. Having passed under the railroad tracks, turn left on Lehigh Avenue. Follow Lehigh to the next traffic light which is Emerald Street. Turn left on Emerald Street.

31. EMERALD STREET. Some streets in Kensington were named after the heavenly gems identified in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. They are: Amber, Coral, Jasper, Emerald, Agate, and Garnet.

32. THE FREE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, Emerald and Elkhart Streets was started in 1862. St. John's was one of the first "free" churches. This meant that worshippers did not have to pay rent for their pews which was a common practice in churches at that time. The current Vicar is Father Don Graff.

O. Follow Emerald Street to Tioga Street, turn left and go to Kensington Avenue. There, bear to the right up "K" Street. Follow "K" Street until it dead ends at Cayuga Street.

33. On "K" Street just north of the railroad and below Sedgley Street was CEDAR GROVE, a quaint stone mansion. "The farm originally belonged to Thomas Coates, who settled there around 1721. His daughter, Elizabeth married Joseph Paschall who built the mansion in 1744. A daughter of Paschall, Sarah married Isaac Morris, and they fell heir to the place. This is one of the mansions that is still in existence, but it is not

at the above location. It was moved in 1927 to Fairmount Park, and is located on Lansdowne Drive. It is well worth seeing!" Father Twelves added: "While we think of Kensington as having rows and rows of small brick houses, this was not always so. Scattered around the area where we lived were a number of old mansions, surrounded by large grounds, with trees and shrubbery. These houses were occupied by what we then called rich persons. In many of these large houses lived the mill owners... Later on many of these larger houses were torn down and smaller row houses erected on the property" (5, p.19,20).

P. At Cayuga Street turn right and drive to Castor Avenue (stay to the right). At Castor turn right. Go one block to Bristol Street. Turn right again and follow Bristol until it dead ends at "G" Street.

34. The CARL MACKLEY APARTMENTS at Cayuga Street and Castor Avenue was originally a housing project sponsored by the Full Fashioned Hosiery Workers' Union as a memorial to Carl Mackley and a modern residence for hosiery workers' families. The Project was funded by a federal loan of $1,039,000. plus some money raised by the hosiery workers. See: "Kensington Episodes", V.

Q. From Bristol Street turn left onto "G" Street. Follow "G" Street to Erie Avenue where you will turn right.

35. The MINERAL SPRINGS OF HARROWGATE were in the area of "G" and Erie. They were discovered in 1784 by George Esterley. "It was a well known health resort. The water was used both for drinking and bathing. There was a public garden there and exhibits and musical concerts were held there. It was given the name of Vaux Hall after a similar resort in London" (6, p.19).

R. After turning right onto Erie, follow it to 6th Street. Erie bears to the right at 2nd Street. Follow Erie and turn left on 6th Street. Then turn right on Venango Street. Then left again on 9th Street.

36. At 6th and Venango Streets is CHRIST CHURCH AND ST. AMBROSE. The building here was originally Christ Church, Franklinville which was begun by the City Mission in 1871. The present Church is the result of a merger with St. Ambrose Church, Kensington also begun by the City Mission in 1894. It will be remembered that the Rev. Frederick Halsey, Rector of St. Ambrose Church from 1919 to 1931 preached at the funeral of Carl Mackley. See: "Kensington Episodes", V. Presently, Christ Church and St. Ambrose is at the heart of Diocesan Spanish ministry and is under the direction of Father Elias Penaloza.

S. Follow 9th Street south to Lehigh Avenue. 9th Street bears to the left at Tioga Street. It dead ends in Ontario Street.

Turn right one block then left back onto 9th Street. Continue south on 9th Street. Turn right on Glenwood Street just before Allegheny. Go one block and left again on 9th Street. Continue down 9th Street. At Lehigh Ave. turn left and follow it to Kensington Avenue. Turn right on Kensington and return to St. Luke's.

37. At 9th Street and Lehigh Avenue is what once was ST. SIMEON'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, begun in 1886. The large church building which is now used by a Baptist Church was completed in 1891 as a memorial to Bishop Stevens. "For many years this parish had the largest communicant membership in the Diocese, numbering over 2,200"(5, p.208). This Church was responsible for reopening St. Peter's Great Valley Church near Paoli and for starting St. Simeon's-by-the-Sea Parish in Wildwood, N.J. In 1977, St. Simeon's had run its course. There was no one to come to breathe new life into her as she had once done for St. Peter's. And what once was the largest Church in the Diocese closed its doors.

38. EDISON HIGH SCHOOL is at 8th and Lehigh on the left. Edison is known for an excellent electronics program. The school used to be Northeast High which moved out of the neighborhood, leaving its old and worn buildings to Edison. Recently, a coalition of community groups representing White, Black, and Hispanic parents and receiving alot of leadership from KJAC managed to obtain a commitment for a new high school for District 5 students at Front and Luzerne Streets, a site which includes 28 acres of ground. District 5 schools which include Kensington have the highest dropout rate of any in the city -- around 20%.

39. On Lehigh between Lawrence and 4th on the left is the QUAKER LACE COMPANY. Originally this building was occupied by the Joseph H. Bromley Company, a carpet mill. "However, in 1909, to stimulate a lace making industry, Congress removed the tariff on imported lace making and embroidery machinery, and numerous new companies were started to make cotton lace and cotton lace curtains. Quaker Lace Company was one such firm. It grew to become one of the two largest lace manufacturers in the world. Lace is still being manufactured here" (4, p.35).

40. The LIGHTHOUSE at Mascher Street and Lehigh Avenue was founded by the Episcopal laywoman, Esther Kelly as a settlement house in 1893. Today, the Lighthouse runs a variety of recreational, educational, and social programs. It offers great baseball and soccer leagues for thousands of Kensington young people.

41. At Front Street and Lehigh Avenue new housing has been built called SECTION EIGHT HOUSING. Occupants can only pay one quarter of their income for rent. The rest is subsidized by the government. Sixteen percent of the existant housing in this neighborhood is abandoned.

42. EPISCOPAL HOSPITAL is located on the right between Front Street and "B" Street. Bishop Alonzo Potter established the Episcopal Hospital in 1852. It is the oldest existing hospital in Kensington. The 1830s saw severe epidemics of cholera, T.B., and yellow fever. Those who could afford to, fled out of the city to create communities such as Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy, and Torresdale. The Kensington textile workers and their families were left behind. The Episcopal Hospital was built to respond to the need for medical care in this community.

    At the same time that the hospital cared for the physical needs of Kensington's people, it also had a real concern for spiritual life in the community. Evangelism was a high priority, and within its first fifty years the hospital saw to the establishment of three neighborhood churches. The current Chaplain of the Hospital is Father Benjamin Axelroad.

43. Between "A" Street and "B" Street on the left was JOHN BROMLEY AND SONS textile mill, a 5-story building constructed in stages between 1886 and 1892. "At its peak in the 1920s, this was perhaps the largest textile manufacturer in Philadelphia employing 2,300 people. The main products here were rugs and carpets, but chenille curtains, table covers, and lace goods were also made. The plant extended as far back as Somerset Street, and in addition to the main building, included a picker house, office building, wing buildings, a lace mill, a chenille mill, a weaving shed, a dye house, a boiler house, an engine house, and a sizing house" (4, p.35-36). The building burned in an arson fire in 1979. A shopping center is now planned for the empty lot.

...THE END.

You have now finished a tour of Kensington, its homes, factories, and churches. You have seen thirteen work places, eleven of which are no longer in operation representing a loss of nearly 40,000 jobs. Only a fraction of these have been replaced.